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ABSTRACT

Tone-based classification rules for Igbo nouns need modification because: (1) class 1 nouns (monosyllables with high tones) do not, as claimed, operate differently from other terminal high-tone nouns; and (2) class 6 nouns (di-syllabic with downstep tones) can be accounted for within class 2 and class 3 nouns known as HH and LH nouns). The proper nouns usually assigned to class 6 are best understood as vestigial sentences functioning in "subject position nouns." In double-object Igbo constructions, downstep occurs only in nouns occupying object-position 1 of a single object noun phrase (NP), or occupying object-position 2 of the double-object NP, and as N2 in the associative construction. If in the associative construction second-syllable high tone nouns in N2 become downstep and second-syllable low tone nouns in N2 retain their inherent low tones, the two case-tone classes serve as case-shift markers for the Igbo noun. Case-tone A occurs as subject of verb or verb-phrase, provided the noun in not part of a NP, and after an infinitive construction, even if the noun is part of a NP. Case-tone B occurs as the immediate object in an imperative verb/verb-phrase, and after a head-noun in an associated construction. (Author/MSE)

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The Case-Tone Factor in Igbo Nouns, with Special Reference to the Igbo Associative Construction

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Abstract

Tone-based classification rules for Igbo nouns need modification because a) Class 1 nouns (monosyllables with High tones) do not, as claimed, operate differently from other terminal High-tone nouns; and b) Class 6 nouns (di-syllabic with Downstep tones) can be accounted for within Class 2 and Class 3 (HH and LH nouns). The proper nouns usually assigned to Class 6 are best understood as vestigial sentences functioning in "subject position nouns."

With regard to the double-object Igbo constructions, Downstep occurs only in nouns occupying **Object-position 1** of a single object NP, or occupying **Object-position 2** of the double-object NP; and of course as N^2 in the Associative Construction.

If, as will be proposed, in the Associative Construction, a) 2nd-syllable High tone nouns in N^2 become Downstep, and b) 2nd-syllable Low tone nouns in N^2 retain their inherent low tones, then, the two Case-Tone Classes serve as case/shift markers for the Igbo noun, as folows:

CASE-TONE A: Occurs in two contexts:

i) as the subject of a verb or verb-phrase, provided the noun is not part of a Noun-Phrase; and ii) after an infinitive construction, even if the noun is part of a noun-phrase.

CASE-TONE B: Occurs also in two contexts:

i) as the immediate object on an imperative verb/verb-phrase; and

ii) after a head-noun in an associated construction.

The Case-Tone Factor in Igbo Nouns, with Special Reference to the Igbo Associative Construction

Introduction:

This paper grew out of my experience with Igbo tone marking in the course of the work I am doing on a comprehensive Dictionary of Igbo. For 2-syllable Igbo nouns, I first adopted a 4-class system of tone patterns, as follows. (1a-d)

1.	a)	HH	ákwá	tears	Nwachukwu Class 2
	b)	HL	ákwà	cloth	Nwachukwu Class 5
	c)	LH	àkwá	egg	Nwachukwu Class 3
	d)	LL	àkwà	bed	Nwachukwu Class 4
	e)	HS	ágǖ	tiger	Nwachukwu Class 6

I later revised this system (following Ogbonnaya [1975] and Nwachukwu [1983]) to allow for (HS) nouns like ágǖ = tiger, and Énū̄ (= personal name) which, because of the Downstep tone in their 2nd syllable, were thought to belong to an entirely different class. (1e)

Increasingly, however, I began to have concerns about this practice. Although I was aware that linguists made a distinction between "inherent" and "non-inherent" tones in Igbo, I was not sure that the HS tone pattern in ágǖ was sufficiently "inherent" to deserve being granted a separate classification, especially as every word so classified also could manifest itself with full semantic adequacy with an HH tone.(2a-c)

2.	a)	Ágū	Ágú	tiger
	b)	Énū	Énú	Personal name
	c)	Ókā	Ókā	Proper name

The first question, then, was whether to accept the HS sequence in these cases as justifying constituting a separate tone class for Igbo nouns.

But beyond that practical question was a even more troubling one. In none of the papers and books I had seen was there any extended account of the correlation between tone changes in the Igbo noun and what, in traditional grammars of --say, English or Latin --, we might speak of as case or shift. I was not naive enough to think that the absence was the result of a conspiracy to deny Igbo the luxury of a full Latin-like array of case-forms. My concern was that my experience of Igbo, as a native speaker, and as a lexicographer, led me to many instances where the HS tone pattern seemed to mark the noun's quite specific and regular grammatical functions.

The so-called "Igbo Associative Construction" and the "Double-Object Construction" were the only two situations in the literature which had addressed this feature. As I will show later, these accounts appeared to want to explain this tone-feature in terms either of phonetic adjacency or else by complex phonological arguments which, as Maduka-Durunze (1992) put it rather politely, have the effect "of making the phenomenon appear more complex than it may be presumed to be" (p. 169).

Although I have no specialist credentials to presume to make anything like a serious statement on the issue, I believe that the matters I raise in this paper may help specialists re-think their general statements on the tonology and grammar of Igbo nouns; or at least encourage them to explain the situation in a more satisfactory fashion than hitherto.

The Question of Case:

I have found very little in existing literature that relates to the question of tone as a case-marker for Igbo nouns. This is not surprising since most students of Igbo regard tone as primarily a matter for "lexical" rather "grammatical" analysis. The statement by Bendor-Samuel and Paul Meier in their study of tone in Izi (1974) is typical: the "primary function of tone is lexical....[It] distinguishes one morpheme from another," the only exception he allow being in the case of the "relative sentence juncture" (37-38). The closest there has been to an acknowledgment of tone as a case marker is in the distinction made between "inherent" and "non-inherent" tones in respect of Igbo nouns. According to Ogbonnaya's account (1975), the "inherent" (or "lexical") tone is said to belong to the words "in isolation," as opposed to the "non-inherent" (or "grammatical") tone which occurs only "in construction" (p. 110). Specifically, Ogbonnaya (1975) notes that his Class I (HH)and Class II (LH) nouns lose their inherent tone when they are the "direct object (without any adjective) of a verb in the Imperative, and the na- or ga- forms" (p. 107), which is why the "non-

inherent or grammatical tone reveals itself when the word is used in a clause or phrase, e.g. in the genetival phrase (p. 105). This is, implicitly, to acknowledge that the tone change in respect of these nouns may be functioning as an object-case or genetive-case marker.

Clark states in her chapter on "lexical Phonology of [Igbo] Nouns" (1992) that the Igbo noun consists of "a monosyllabic or polysyllabic stem plus a vocalic or syllabic nasal prefix" (p. 221). This would suggest that the core tone in the noun resides in its 2nd syllable, especially as it is widely held that Igbo nouns are (at a sufficiently deep level) nominalizations of Igbo verbs. Anagbogü's work (1990) on these nominalizations suggests that the tone of the 2nd syllable of the de-verbal noun is always that of its root verb. Both Anagbogü and Clark admit that while many Igbo nouns are formed from verb roots, "the majority" do not have "verbal cognates" (e.g. Clark, p. 222). To characterize the first syllable of the Igbo noun as "a vocalic or syllabic prefix" when most Igbo nouns do not appear to have been formed from verb stems is to misrepresent the true morphology of Igbo nouns.

The failure to acknowledge tone as a case-marker in Igbo, combined with the claim that Igbo has none of the noun-class characteristics of many other Niger-Congo languages, has led (I believe) to an untidiness in the classification of Igbo nouns. Clark claims that this "handful of nouns, including jí 'yam' and dí 'husband' (there are actually only three of them] have no prefix presumably because they are assigned their inflectional features in lexical representation" (Clark, p. 222). Like

Ogbonnaya and others, Nwachukwu classifies Igbo nouns exclusively on the basis of their "tonal behaviour." Nwachukwu's (1983) 6-class schema, which modifies Ogbonnaya's 5 classes, makes room for the apparently problematic monosyllabic noun.

3. Classes: 1 2 3 4 5 6

Tone Pattern: H HH LH LL HL H!H (= HS)

Nwachukwu assigns the Igbo monosyllabic nouns to a special class (Class 1) on the grounds that although the High tone of the monosyllable becomes a Downstep High in the associated construction "other high tone items do not give rise to the tone pattern" exhibited by this class of nouns (p. 45). I see no such difference.

Take the following examples (4a-d).

4. a. High tone in serial numeration:

cí na dí na jí

b. Downstepped N^2 in Genetival Construction:

cí dị̄; cí jị̄; dí cị̄; dí jị̄; jí cị̄; jí dị̄

c. High tone in N^1 after (H-tone) direct imperative

nyé cí jị̄; nyé dí jị̄; *nyé jí dị̄

d. Downstep tone in N^1 after (L-tone) post-infinitive.

ꜜnyè cị̄ jị̄; ꜜnyè dị̄ jị̄; ꜜnyè dị̄ cị̄; ꜜnyè jị̄ cị̄

It is clear from these examples that the three nouns in question exhibit the same tone changes we would expect of Nwachukwu's Class 2 and Class 3 nouns.

A more troubling classification involves those nouns (examples are ágü, éze [from Nwachukwu]; égo and ohi [from Ogbonnaya]) said to have a High + a Downstep (HS) tone pattern. This classification creates a problem of a special kind. First, for each example given, there is clearly also a valid Igbo form, even in the same dialect, that maintains the HH tone we would expect of HS nouns in subject positions.(5a-d)

5.	HS	HH	meaning
a)	ágǖ	ágú	tiger
b)	ézē	ézé	tooth
c)	égō	égé	money
d)	óhī	óhí	theft

Secondly, each of the examples given has a regular Class 2 realization in Igbo. (6a-b)

6.		
ai)	ágú na ézé	tiger and tooth.
aii)	ágú ézē; ézé ágǖ	tiger-tooth; tiger's tooth.
bi)	óhí na égó	theft and money.
bii)	óhí égō; égó óhī	money-theft; money of [from] theft.

The possible exceptions usually cited are the so-called Proper/Personal Nouns. Nwachukwu offers the following examples (7a-b):

7.		
a)	Ábō	place name
b)	Énū	personal name

But even these particular examples are possibly misleading, since although similar to Class 2 and Class 3 nouns, these "Given" or "Personal" names, as Ubahakwe (1981) has shown, represent base portions

of Noun-Phrases that are remnants of even longer phrase-strings or sentences. In any event, Umeasiegbu (1978) has argued rather persuasively that the relative clause plus its antecedent in formations such as "Ögö tiri ïgba" = "Ögö who beat drum") is a nominalized sentence which behaves syntactically like any monomorphemic noun (146-47).

What these examples actually demonstrate is that some nouns, when used as personal names, take on the Obective-case tone pattern. That is to say, some common nouns which become personal names take on tonal characteristics which can be predicted from grammatical rules. That these forms appear alongside HH tone formations argues against the view that they constitute a Class of their own. There are no semantic or grammatical reasons for thinking so, as the chart below demonstrates.(8) (The examples are taken from each of Nwachukwu's Class 2, 3, 4, and 5 nouns).

8.

Noun	Class	Proper noun	
		Subject Pos	Object Pos 1
ányá	2	Ányá	Anyā
òké	3	Òké	Òkē
àlà	4	Àlà	Àlà
ǘzǒ	5	Ǘzǒ	Ǘzǒ

Thirdly, in this connection, we should draw attention to Clark's suggestion, (itself deriving from Williamson [1972], that this class of nouns may be a feature of "some dialects, especially Onica dialect", and that the feature is "precluded in Öhühü and other Central dialects by

the rule of Nominal H Association" (225). She cites minimal pairs from Williamson to support this view. My argument is that such pairs exist in Igbo for all 2-syllable HH nouns. Or to put it differently, there are no HS nouns in Igbo that do not have viable HH variants. These variants occur, not so much because of dialect variations, but of grammatical position. (Note: Clark, however, thinks that these contrasts are "presumably, holdovers from an earlier historical period when Igbo was a three-tone language").

Associated Construction:

Tone change has long been identified as a particular feature of the Igbo Associated or Genetive Construction, that is the construction in which, of two concatenated nouns, usually in the form

N^1 (Head) + N^2 (Modifier)

the second noun carries the genetive element. Clark (1990) argues that the tonal changes in this construction are the "effect of an asscoiative preposition which consists, phonologically, of a high-toned v-position" (253). Following Willimason (1986), Clark also argues that in the case of "proper name possessives," the "special tonal characteristics" of the associated construction are the effect of a "low-toned 'definite' particle, between the associated particle and the noun prefix" (p. 255). This over-complicates the actual position; and forces us, unfortunately, to fabricate other arguments to account for the many exceptions her rules generate.

The tidiest account to-date of the associative construction is provided by Maduka-Durunze (1992) who demonstrates the inadequacy of previous accounts of this feature, and argues that the construction cannot "afford to be so complex as to demand explanations using a set of several hypotheses, complex underlying forms and many rules that are ontologically very diverse" (p. 170). Instead, he makes two assumptions and offers two rules. (9a-b)

9. Maduka-Durunze's Theory:

ai) Assumption 1: a floating H tone for gentive constructions attached to V^2 of N^1.

aii) Assumption 2: A HL for the phenomenon of Downstep, attached one-to-one to V^1 and V^2 of N^2, respectively.

bi) Rule 1: The Tone-Merging Rule: Identical tones will merge into one; opposing tones will merge to form a steptone S. These rules are phonetic rather than phonological.

bii) Rule 2: The S-specific Polarity Rule: A S if attached to N^1 and between two identical tones will be perceived as an opposing tone. If the environment itself is polarized, S is stable only in the immediate neighbourhood of H. In the immediate neighbourhodd of L, it lapses into L.

The rules do explain the various combinations of noun classes in the associated construction, as the Chart below (adapted from Maduka-Durunze) demonstrates:

10.	In isolation	In construction		In isolation	In construction
	a) HH HH ====>	HH HS	i)	LH HH ====>	LH HS
	b) HH HL ====>	HH HL	j)	LH HL ====>	LH HL
	c) HH LH ====>	HH SS	k)	LH LH ====>	LH SS
	d) HH LL ====>	HH LL	l)	LH LL ====>	LH LL
	e) HL HH ====>	HL HS	m)	LL HH ====>	LL HS
	f) HL HL ====>	HL HL	n)	LL HL ====>	LL HL
	g) HL LH ====>	HS SS	o)	LL LH ====>	LH SS
	h) HL LL ====>	HS LL	p)	LL LL ====>	LH LL

The problem with this resolution, however, is that it continues to regard the Downstep in N^2 of the Associative Construction as a phonetic event. That is, although Maduka-Durenze recognizes that this occurence is linked to a floating "genetive" H tone, he nevertheless insists on the outcome having been determined solely by the fact of phonetic adjacency. It is certainly not clear whether the presence of the tone changes in some or its absence in others has anything to do with the associative construction itself, or is produced by a case-tone rule factor in the tonology of Igbo nouns at large. This is especially so, since the only reported change in N^1 (from HL to HS, before an initial L in N^2) is questionable (see 10g and 10h) above). The evidence would seem to suggest that Igbo nouns have two distinct case-forms which apply without exception to 2-syllable nouns with a final H tone. These case-forms are realised in strictly formal grammatical contexts, of which the Associative construction is only one.

The Double-Object Construction:

In his MIT Monograph on "The Argument Structure of Igbo Verbs," Nwachukwu says as follows concerning the Double Object construction in Igbo.

> ... there is no such rule as Dative Shift in Igbo syntax, and therefore there is no double object alternation in the language. ... However there is in the language a rule [the Locative Shift] which has exactly the same effect as the application of the Dative Shift in English, namely it yields a double object output. But there is a difference, the semantic class of verbs that participate [sic] in the Locative Alternation [sic] are different from the class that is associated with double object verbs in English (p. 12).

Perhaps because of his focus on the Igbo verb, Nwachukwu does not dwell enough on the tone patterns in the nouns associated with this construction. Instead, he offers the intriguing possibility that Igbo (which has only a double-object structure) stands at one end of a continuum from English (which has both a double-object structure and the dative Shift) (p. 10). Nwachukwu also notes that in Igbo the direct object always gives way to the indirect object, and the direct object to the applicative NP. Nwachukwu comes closest to dealing with the case-tone factor in his explanation for this process. On pp. 12-13, he writes:

> The answer seems to lie in the following explanation: the applicative NP is another type of dative argument expressing the entity or subject on whose behalf, advantage or disadvantage the action expressed by the verb is carried out. But there can be no two positionally determined dative NP's in one and the same sentence in Igbo; in other words no one verb can license two such datives without the use of another category which itself can license one of the positions (12-13).

What this explanation lacks, I suspect, is a fuller account of the cognate noun in Igbo verbals, and its consequences for the structure of Igbo verb arguments. For the cognate construction (because inherently tautological) misrepresents itself in relation to other verb arguments; that is, in respect of verbs which consistently take a variety of noun complements.(11a-f)

11.	a)	gbáá mgbà	wrestle	cognate
	b)	gbáá ösö	run	non-cognate
	c)	gbáá égbè	fire a gun, shoot	cognate?
	d)	gbáá ükà	go sour	non-cognate
	e)	gbáá yà àsü	spit at him/her	non-cognate
	f)	gbáá	escape	empty

Nwachukwu's conclusion goes a little too far. He writes: "linear sequence or order alone is the sole indicator of grammatical relation in the language in the absence of any morphological markings on nouns" (p. 15). Nwachukwu is saying, in effect, that the Igbo verb can have two

object-nouns whose grammatical features (accusative or dative, in traditonal grammar) are taken to be marked by word order, and word order alone, and tone-marking is not a relevant factor. But compare tone and position in the following instances. (12a-e)

12.	Verb	Pos-1	Pos-2	Pos-3	Meaning
a)	kwuo	ókwū			spoke (speech)
b)	kwuru	ínyō			spoke nonesense
c)	gwara	mù	ókwú	ínyō	spoke nonesense to me
d)	rere	jí	ökü		set yam on fire
e)	rere	ísí	agü		sold tiger's head

In a) above, Pos-1 is occupied by a cognate; in b) by a direct object; in c) by what (as can be seen from the English translation) might be construed as an indirect object; in d) and e) by a direct object.

Clearly, the underlying structure of the Igbo Verb-Phrase can be described as follows: Positions 1 and 2 are occupied in this ranked order:

a) indirect object (which may itself be a noun phrase);

b) direct object (which may also be a noun phrase)

c) cognate (or a complement in verbs without cognates).

If you add the tonal changes that take place, you have a case-tone factor which must be recognized as working with word order in the syntax of Igbo nouns: the 2nd syllable High tone of the Igbo noun becomes a Downstep in Position 1 of a) and b); and in Position 2 of d) and e) above.

Conclusion:

The evidence suggests that the Igbo noun does not change its inherent tones unless:

1. The second syllable is a High Tone; and
2. a) The noun occurs independently in Object-Position 1; or
   b) The noun occurs as N^2 of an Associative construction.

This means that: (13a-d)

13.

a) A 2nd syllable High-tone in an Igbo noun becomes a Downstep in an Object-position 1.

b) A 2nd syllable Low-tone in an Igbo noun remains unchanged in any position.

c) Both 2nd syllable High and Low tone Igbo nouns remain unchanged in object position 2

d) The above rules apply even when the NP in Object-position 2 is an Associative construction

In view of the above, I propose (14A-B) a two-class case-tone hypothesis for the Igbo noun.

CASE-TONE A: Occurs in two contexts:

i) as the subject of a verb or verb-phrase, provided the noun is not part of a Noun-Phrase; and

ii) after an infinitive construction, even if the noun is part of a noun-phrase.

CASE-TONE B: Occurs also in two contexts:

i) as the immediate object on an imperative verb/verb-phrase; and

ii) after a head-noun in an associated construction.

14.	A	i:	Éwú nwere ísí	Goat has a head
	A	ii:	ì-nwe éwú	to have a goat
	B	i:	nwee éwū	have a goat
	B	ii	ìsí éwū	head of a goat

Hence, (using Maduka-Durenze's sets (pp. 171-2), we derive these patterns: (15a-b)

15. a) the 2nd syllable High tone in éwú and òsá become S

after ísí (ísí éwú/ò̀sā)

ű́lö̀ (ű́lö̀ éwú/ò̀sā)

àhű́ (àhű́ éwú/ò̀sā)

àgbà (àgbà éwú/ò̀sā)

b) the 2nd syllable Low tone in ázù and ènwè remain unchanged

after ísí (ísí ázù/ènwè)

ű́lö̀ (ű́lö̀ ázù/ènwè)

àhű́ (àhű́ ázù/ènwè)

àgbà (àgbà ázù/ènwè)

The above is shown in schematic form as (16):

16. Nominative Associative

Subj pos.	Post-inf pos.	Obj-pos 1	Obj pos 2.
ẃwú nyere	i-nye ẃwú	nye ẃwū	nye ẃwū ẃwú
ázù nyere	i-nye ázù	nye ázù	nye ázù ázù
ò̀ósá nyere	i-nye ò̀ósá	nye ò̀ósā	nye ò̀ósā ò̀ósá
ènwè nyere	i-nye ènwè	nye ènwè	nye ènwè ènwè

I also propose a strict 4-Class Noun scheme. The so-called errant forms "ji" and "agü" can be accommodated within four classes. I feel sure enough about this argument to have proceeded to revise the tone entry for ágü in my Igbo Dictionary from HS to HH.

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